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Brooke F Adams 08/10/2006 05:16:07 PM From DB/Inbox: Brooke F Adams

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Text:

UNCLAS TRIPOLI 00410

SIPDIS
CXCAIRO:

ACTION: POL
INFO: RSO PA ORA OMC LEGAT IPS ECON DEA DCM DAO CONS
AMB AID

DISSEMINATION: POL
CHARGE: PROG

VZCZCCRO096
RR RUEHEG
DE RUEHTRO #0410/01 2221247
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 101247Z AUG 06
FM AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1096
INFO RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 0383
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI 1233

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TRIPOLI 000410

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PREL ODIP CMGT LY
SUBJECT: THE VISA BLUES: TRIPOLI CONSULS SING IN UNISON

¶1. (SBU) Consular officers from fifteen foreign embassies with representation in Libya gathered last week at the home of the Pakistani consul to discuss common challenges faced in obtaining visitor, business, and diplomatic visas to Libya. In addition to TDY Conoff/Econoff from Embassy Tripoli, consuls from the Philippines, Italy, Yemen, Poland, Russia, Korea, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Serbia, and South Africa attended the meeting. The meeting's goal was to formulate a common approach to working with the GOL on ameliorating the problems that all non-Arab nationals are having obtaining tourist, business, and diplomatic visas to Libya.

COMMON CHALLENGES

¶2. (SBU)

-----Diplomatic visas: Obtaining diplomatic visas in a timely manner continues to be a challenge for most of the countries represented. In an extreme example, the consul from the Embassy of Russia expressed frustration over waiting seven months for his visa, apparently linked to the fact that the Russians had denied a Libyan traveling on an official passport a visa because he was on their restricted security list. A diplomat from the Philippines easily obtained a visa in her home country due to a personal connection with the Libyan Embassy in Manila, but because it wasn't processed through the normal official channels, faced great difficulty in converting it to a residency permit here.

----- Business visas: Obtaining business visas is not an easy feat for most western nationals, due to the long list of requirements necessary to receive a visa. Most agreed that this could be partially intentional on the part of the government, but may also be in part a matter of organization as pre-approvals must be faxed to their embassies abroad from Tripoli, which can easily be lost or misplaced. For all countries facing this challenge, there is a trend for businesspeople to enter on tourist visas, which are relatively easy to obtain via well connected travel agencies.

-----Third Country Nationals: Employing third country nationals at foreign embassies is a growing difficulty. The Korean consul linked this to the Manpower Minister's supposed mandate to drastically reduce the Libyan unemployment rate. He also noted that Korean companies are having trouble obtaining work visas for many of their nationals who are slated to work at Korean companies based in Libya, the implication being that Libyans must be employed instead. The Pakistani consul's son was offered a job at Schlumberger, but his visa has been stalled, possibly for the same reason. The Italian consul was informed that effective last month, all visas that go through the protocol office will also be vetted through the manpower office, presumably to ensure that Libyans are being employed as often as possible.

SIGNS OF IMPROVEMENT

¶3. (SBU)

-----Tourist visas: All nationalities, with the exception of the U.S., are having relative success obtaining tourist visas via travel agencies who set up package tours. Travel agencies with good connections in the government are said to have the highest success rate of obtaining tourist visas. Cruise ships stopping at Mediterranean destinations frequently disembark in Tripoli Harbor and unload several hundred tourists at a time. Short term visas upon generally granted upon arrival, though it takes one to two hours of processing.

-----Dip visas at the airport: Officials from the GOL told consuls from other Embassies that they are considering issuing visas to diplomats at the airport, though a pre-approval from the MFA would still be required.

FUTURE GOALS

¶4. (SBU) Consuls decided to hold monthly meetings to exchange information and share updates on visa issues. In addition, a steering committee composed of the Philippine, Pakistani, and Italian consuls was formed to draft a proposal to work on the following goals:

-----Visa Reciprocity: Engage with the Libyan authorities on dedicating themselves to enforcing visa reciprocity. Most countries represented at the meeting issue visas for Libyan nationals within seven to ten working days for all categories, but few were receiving similar treatment.

-----Ambassadorial Meeting: Discuss a possible effort to request some of our ambassadors collectively meet with GOL officials regularly on areas of common concern to foreign embassies regarding visa issues. While several in the group wanted the US to take an active leadership role in this initiative, Conoff explained that we might not be as persuasive a spokesman as other countries because we don't have visa issuing capability yet.

¶5. Comment. The GOL has told post repeatedly that until we establish full visa operations in Tripoli, they will reciprocate by limiting visa services to Americans. Once post begins issuing visas, we anticipate some relief to the additional challenges U.S. travelers face in obtaining Libyan visas. However, the experience of other foreign missions that have full visa issuance authority in Tripoli is far from perfect and indicates that visa difficulties are endemic to Libya's dealings with its foreign guests.

BERRY